

# Medicines from Chinese Treasures

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Today China is the only country in the world still making significant quantities of medicines containing rhino horn. Having exhausted its own supplies by the eighth century, it became a major importer. The rhino horn medicines are both consumed locally and exported. Notwithstanding the fact that China joined CITES in 1981, rhino horn has continued to come into the country, principally from North Yemen, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, with smaller quantities smuggled in from Singapore and Thailand. The manufactured medicines go mainly to South East Asian countries.

At the end of 1988, the Chinese CITES Management Authority, under the Ministry of Forests, demanded that all import/export corporations and drug factories register their stocks of rhino horn.

**Table I**  
**China's 1989 Rhino Horn Stock Registration**

Establishment	Amount in kg
China National Corporation of Traditional and Herbal Medicine (based in Beijing)	3,405.8
Tianjin Medicine & Health Products Import/Export Corporation	407.0
Guangdong Drug Corporation	1,550.2
Yunnan Drug Corporation	989.6
Beijing Drug Corporation	469.3
Tianjin Drug Corporation	435.2
Shanghai Drug Corporation	410.9
Liaoning Drug Corporation	242.2
Jilin Drug Corporation	202.2
Qinghai Drug Corporation	101.0
Xinjiang Drug Corporation	75.0
Hubei Drug Corporation	45.9
Gansu Drug Corporation	30.5
Tibet Drug Corporation	10.0
Others	1,500.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,874.8</b>

*\*Although the word 'Corporation' is used in the names of the above establishments when translated from the Chinese, all but the first two would be classified as 'factories' in English usage.*

*Source: China Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora Import/Export, Administrative Office,*

**Table II**  
**Average Consumption of Rhino Horn per Year**

Establishment	Amount in kg
Beijing Drug Corporation	150
Shanghai Drug Corporation	150
Guangdong Drug Corporation	100
Tianjin, Drug Corporation	100
Others	150
<b>Total</b>	<b>650</b>

*Source: China National Corporation of Traditional and Herbal Medicine.*

Details of the results obtained in December 1989 are in Table I. The total amount held was 9,875 kg; however, this does not include rhino horn in retail medicine shops, museums or private ownership. The industrial stocks are undeniably the largest in the world, and more importantly are still being used to make medicines. Between 600 and 700 kg of rhino horn are being used each year and, if demand continues at the same rate, the drug factories have enough supplies to last at least 15 more years (Table II). As far as conservationists are concerned, since some of these rhino medicines are getting onto the international market they are further encouraging the demand for rhino horn. At the Ottawa CITES meeting in 1987 member states including China, were requested to ban all internal trade in rhino products. Hong Kong and Macao, two major importers of Chinese manufactured medicines, have complied, but China has not, arguing that the horns being used were acquired before joining CITES.

In order to exert control over the export of rhino horn medicines China has, however, recently changed its law. As from the end of 1988 all exports of these medicines require a permit from the Chinese CITES Management Authority. No such permits have been issued. Instead, traders especially from South East Asian countries have been buying the medicines wholesale and taking them out of the country. Personal luggage is not usually examined. As an example, on my three trips to China in 1985, 1987 and 1990 none of my baggage was ever opened when I entered or left the country. In addition, some Chinese corporations exported some medicines without asking for permits in 1989.

In April 1990 when I went to China as a guest of the CITES Management Authority in Beijing, I visited a number of import/export corporations and also drug factories which make rhino horn medicines. At the Beijing Tong Ren Tang Pharmaceutical Factory, first established 320 years ago and now the most famous in the country, a manager stated that in 1970 a five-year study was initiated for the purpose of finding the best substitute for rhino horn. The research by various institutes and involving scientists from Tong Ren Tang was completed in 1974 and water buffalo horn was shown to be almost as effective as rhino horn. Consequently, that year the factory started to use water buffalo horn as well as rhino horn. At about that time the China National Corporation of

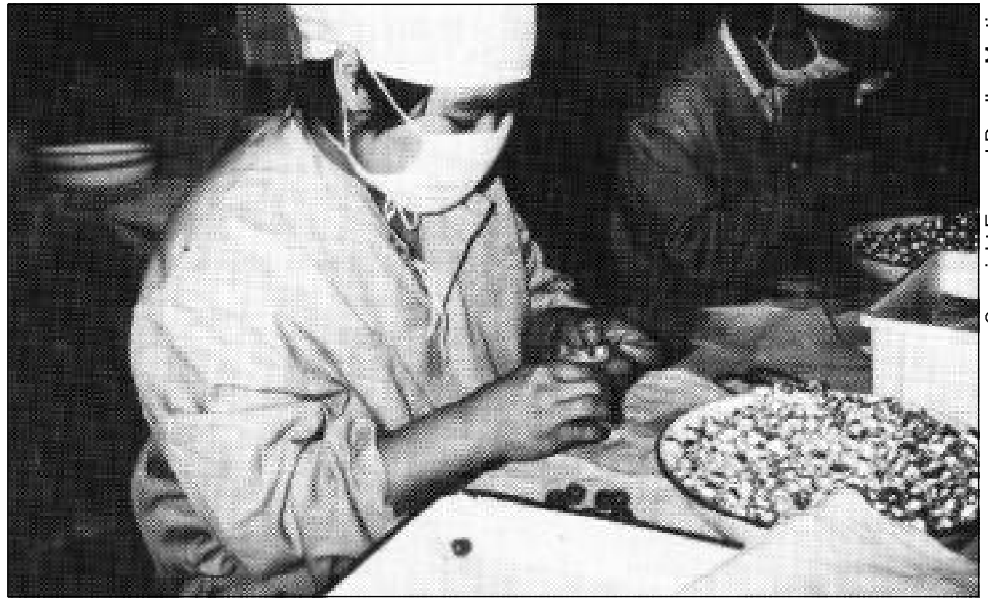


*These magnificently carved rhino horn antiques which were photographed in a Chinese warehouse may be pulverized, like many others have been, for making into medicines.*

Traditional and Herbal Medicine had a stock of 14 tonnes of rhino horn. A major supplier of horn to medicine factories, this corporation now has under four tonnes. The fact is that ten tones were consumed in the making of medicines in the late 1970s and the 1980s decade despite the use of water buffalo horn in some of the products by one of the most important medicine factories.

The Tong Ren Tang Pharmaceutical Factory today manufactures three febrifuge patent medicines containing rhino horn: An Kong Niu Huang, Zi Xue San and Jufang Zhi Bao; the first of these is for adults and also reduces inflammation; the latter two are for lowering fevers in children. When I asked why buffalo horn could not be substituted in these medicines, I was told that expensive stocks had to be used and that overseas Chinese still believed rhino horn to be superior and would not buy such drugs if it was omitted. In visits to drug factories in Tianjin and Guangzhou the answer was always the same. The overseas Chinese are portrayed as scapegoats for continuing to demand rhino horn as an ingredient in patent medicines. They are in fact the major buyers and provide large sums of foreign currency required to recoup the expense of stock purchases and to make profits.

On this trip to China I was given the unique opportunity of visiting the official rhino horn storerooms. No other foreigner nor even the staff of the Chinese CITES Management Authority had ever been inside these storerooms which contain vast amounts of rhino horn. The largest quantity is made up of small cut pieces, most of which are the remains of African horns which were used in North Yemen for making dagger handles. The next most common form of rhino horn is powder, also from North Yemen, either imported directly or via Hong Kong. The only other country which uses rhino horn powder in quantity is South Korea where Chung Shim Won balls are made. Elsewhere, pharmacists who sell rhino horn prefer having recognizahle pieces so that their customers can see what they are getting is genuine. Except in the storeroom of the Guangdong Drug Corporation in the suburbs of Guangzhou there are few whole horns. Many of these are of Indian rhino origin while others are Sumatran back horns, really small protrusions, knob-like in appearance. The latter are referred to as Buddha's eyes by the employees. I saw almost no full horns or large parts from African white or black rhinos. The few which do exist in China are usually found in markets and medicine shops. In February, 1990, Andrew Laurie saw African horn for sale retail in Chengdu, Sichuan province, for US \$3,936 or 18,500 yuan per kg and Sumatran horn for US \$24,468. It was not possible to ascertain what percentage of the chips, powder and full horns were Asian compared with African. However, in the Guangdong Drug Corporation storeroom the manager estimated 10%, adding that Asian horn was far superior medically to African. Personally, I believe that of the almost 10 tonnes of rhino horn in the official stores less than 10% is of Asian origin because so much comes from North Yemen where only African horn is made into dagger handles.



*In the Tong Ren Tang pharmaceutical factory in Beijing, An Kong Nui Huang balls are being made, some of which contain rhino horn.*

Inside locked rooms in godowns in Tianjin, Beijing and Guangzhou one sees a jumble of 25kg sacks, plastic bags, crates and boxes containing chips, powder, whole horns, together with the most amazing form of stock to be used for making medicine, that of antique rhino horn carvings. In the storerooms I visited in Tianjin, Beijing and Guangzhou, all had sacks heedlessly piled together, full of antique plates, cups, libation bowls, brush holders and figurines. I even saw quite a few Sumatran, Indian and Javan carved horns. The Buddhist figures on some small dishes lend me to believe they originated in Laos or Cambodia. All the rest were carved in China; none had been worked in Africa. The antiques were mostly intact and in excellent condition but some were damaged and chipped. Our visit produced a few more casualties. Since we had specifically asked to see all the rhino horn stocks, bags of these antiques were tipped in front of us onto concrete floors, producing more nicks and scratches. Whenever we finished examining the antiques, they were simply gathered together and dumped into sacks, with no attention paid to preventing pieces from damaging one another. The storeroom staff obviously had no idea of the true value of these magnificent works of art carved in the Ming (1368-1644) and Ch'ing (1644-1911) dynasties by master craftsmen probably attached to the workshops of the Emperors.

The trading corporations and medicine factories have been purchasing rhino horn antiques from every possible source since the Revolution in 1949. Some have come from Chinese private collectors while others have been supplied by racketeers dealing in items stolen from the museums. In fact, there are very few rhino horn antiquities to be seen in any of China's museums today. There is no way of telling how many of these valuable works of art have been ground down into powder by the drug corporations. The policy of the Guangdong Drug Corporation is to use the powder, chips, and full horns first, then damaged antiques and finally, the perfect works of art. However, even this corporation has admitted to having already pulverized antique rhino horn cups. It seems that in practice whatever is handiest is used.

There is little doubt that the primary purpose of the drug corporations is to earn as much foreign currency and as large a